DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 839 CE 065 777

TITLE	Introduction to the Danish Vocational Education and Training System.
INSTITUTION	Ministry of Education, Copenhagen (Denmark).; Ministry of Labour, Copenhagen (Denmark).
PUB DATE	[91]
NOTE	7p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Delivery Systems; *Educational Improvement; Educational Needs; Foreign Countries; *Integrated Curriculum; *Job Training; Postsecondary Education; Secondary Education; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Denmark

ABSTRACT

Vocational education and training is a concept that covers a sandwich-type course in which school-based education alternates with firm-based training. Broader courses in Denmark include simultaneous work at companies and school training. The advantage to this system is that students do not waste time training for an occupation that they may not like. At present, Denmark has 85 vocational education and training courses, but there are approximately 300 different specializations. New ways of teaching are being promoted, especially integrated teaching of the theoretical and the practical knowledge of a subject. The vocational education and training courses usually are high-level and lead to examinations for certification. Vocational education and training can be provided by vocational schools and colleges; requirements for time spent at the schools and on the job vary. Basic subjects as well as personal development and social studies should be included. Educational reform is continuing to ensure that students can choose their courses and their occupations and receive the education necessary to pass examinations to receive their journeyworker's license in their fields. (KC)

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INTRODUCTION TO
THE DANISH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

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The Structure

The term: vocational education and training constitutes an unambiguous concept which covers a sandwich-type course where theoretical education at a vocational school/college alternates with practical training in a firm.

Broader Courses

Related courses from the previous system (before the reform) have been merged into fewer courses with a broad-based entry and subsequent specialization. Each course which forms part of the system comprises one or more specializations. As far as quite a number of courses are concerned, this means that the students have the opportunity to opt out, as it is possible for them to choose specializations of a shorter or longer duration.

The typical course is the one where the students at the beginning of the course follow the same basic instruction at a vocational school. The course becomes more and more specialized, the further the students get on with it.

The advantage of this structure is that the students can easily change to another specialization, if they regret their first choice of education. As a result of the broad-based entry, they do not waste time of any great importance, even if they should change their mind and opt for another course.

Relatively few courses, but many specializations

The number of vocational education and training courses is 85, but there is a panoply of approx. 300 different specializations. This is due to the fact that the vocational education and training system is built up around specializations. A number of courses which were independent courses in the old system now exist as specializations within a more broad-based overall course. And at the same

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time, a number of totally new specializations have been created.

In the field of transport, the driver's course for instance comprises 11 specializations.

At the same time, the smith's course comprises 10 specializations which in the present system are independent courses in the field of the iron and metal industries.

The Ideology behind the Reform

Behind the reform of the vocational education and training system lies a desire to create an education system which is more clear, coherent and flexible and which at the same contains a sprinkling of decentralization.

Therefore, the reform does not only comprise structural changes but also new requirements with regard to the form and contents of the teaching.

Integrated Teaching

The key word of the teaching is coherence. The teaching shall be organized in such a way that practical training periods and school periods support and supplement each other. The students shall experience the course as a logical and coherent process where practical training and theoretical education at school supplement each other in a natural way. The coherence shall be expressed in the form of teaching. The teaching in the vocational schools/colleges shall be comprehensive and integrated, i.e. the students shall as far as possible learn the theory by working with practical tasks and problems.

The Theoretical Level and Examination

The vocational education and training courses are generally speaking at a high theoretical level. There is a requirement to the effect that the graduates shall be able to profit from the further education and training possibilities in their area upon completed training. The theoretical level of the courses shall make it pos-

sible for the students to continue directly on a further education course. At the same time, the element of assessment has been strenghtened in the vocational education and training courses. The work effort and level of the students are currently being assessed. The assessment may have the form of an examination or it may be the teacher who makes an assessment of the student's work effort at school. Under all circumstances, the student is awarded a mark according to an approved marking scale. In the majority of the courses, the students shall complete their course with an examination. The examination form varies from course to course, and it may have the form of a journeyman's test, a school examination or a combination of the two.

Courses with Different Profiles

From an administrative point of view, the vocational schools/colleges are autonomous units which are free to dispose both in the economic and in the educational area. This is due to the recent introduction of framework and target planning where only the overall targets and framework are laid down at central level. It is up to the individual vocational school/college in cooperation with its local cooperation partners to decide how the targets and framework can be met. The planning of the concrete contents of the courses will in the future take place at local level.

In reality, it is a question of two sets of targets and framework. One covers the general targets and framework which apply to all vocational schools/colleges and all courses. The other covers the course-specific targets and framework which indicate the principles of the individual courses. They are laid down in orders which have been drawn up for the individual courses. These orders also list the different types of subjects which shall be taken according to an approximate weighting as indicated below:

Basic subjects:	1/3 of the teaching time at the school/college
Area subjects:	1/3 of the teaching time at the school/college
Special subjects:	1/6 of the teaching time at the school/college
Electives:	1/6 of the teaching time at the school/college

The basic subjects comprise practical and theoretical instruction

which contribute to providing the vocational education and training courses with a broad vocational base. At the same time, it is the aim of the basic subjects to meet the requirements set with regard to the youth education courses, i.e. to enhance the personal development of the students, to qualify them for further studies and to convey an understanding of the society and its development to the students.

When making the choice of basic subjects in connection with the area subjects in question and when planning the teaching, it shall be seen to it that

1) The **broad vocational base** of the course is ensured in that the students acquire knowledge about for instance materials, methods, processes, customer service and service, quality consciousness and environment, Danish, foreign languages, mathematics, natural sciences, administration and industrial structures with a view to creating occupational flexibility and a basis for further training and development.

2) The **personal development** of the students is ensured through the stimulation of the students' individual social development, the promotion of the students' ability to acquire new knowledge, the strengthening of the students' independence, creativity, ability to cooperate and formulate themselves, analytical skills and thus their personal self-confidence.

3) The students' prerequisites for further and continuing training, including the advanced technicians' courses are taken into consideration.

4) The students' **understanding of society and its development** is ensured through the acquisition of insight into the basic areas of knowledge regarding social affairs, e.g. history, economic and resource conditions, social conditions, formal and non-formal political systems as well as insight into industrial and labour market and work place conditions, other countries and cultures.

The <u>area subjects</u> comprise practical and theoretical instruction

which is course-specific and which contributes to providing the student with general and specific vocational qualifications.

The area subjects may be common for several courses.

The special subjects, which constitute the highest professional level in the vocational education and training courses, comprise practical and theoretical instruction which is specific for a part of a course and which in particular contributes to providing the students with specific vocational qualifications. The students choose special subjects among the subjects which have been approved for the course in question.

The special subjects may be

1) subjects directed towards that part of the course (line of business) to which the firm, with which the student has entered into a training agreement, belongs and which are thus fixed by virtue of the training agreement, and
2) subjects which the students choose during the school periods.

Planning at Local Level (at the vocational schools/colleges)

On the basis of the acts and general regulations, orders have been elaborated in which the targets and framework of the individual courses are described.

In the preparatory work with the reform, the labour market parties have had a great influence on the planning of the vocational education and training system as such. The division into courses and specializations has more or less totally been decided by the labour market organizations. They also have a decisive influence on the vocational part of the new vocational education and training courses and have thus made substantial contributions to the contents of the orders.

The targets and framework of the orders are to be transformed into teaching practice, and as long as the schools meet the overall targets and framework, they may decide themselves what they will offer teaching in.

As the schools are responsible for the planning of the concrete contents of the teaching, the same course may have a different profile from school to school. A bricklayer who has been trained in one part of the country may have undergone a training course which differs to some extent from a course from another part of the country. But the vocational qualification of the two bricklayers is the same, because the targets and framework for the course and for the journeyman's test or examination is the same at both schools.

Free Choice of Schools

As a consequence of this target and framework planning, there is a free choice of schools for the students and their masters. In other words, the students do not only choose a course and thus their future occupation. It is also possible for them to choose the type and the place which suit them best.